

## Hamilton Community Gardener Survey Results Summary

In Fall 2019, City of Hamilton, Food Strategy and Community Health Worker Program staff carried out a survey to describe community garden participants in Hamilton and the benefits they experience from participating in a community garden. The online survey was shared with community garden coordinators through the Hamilton Community Garden Network who shared it with gardeners. These results are based on 119 respondents from 22 gardens across Hamilton.

### **Who Uses Community Gardens?**

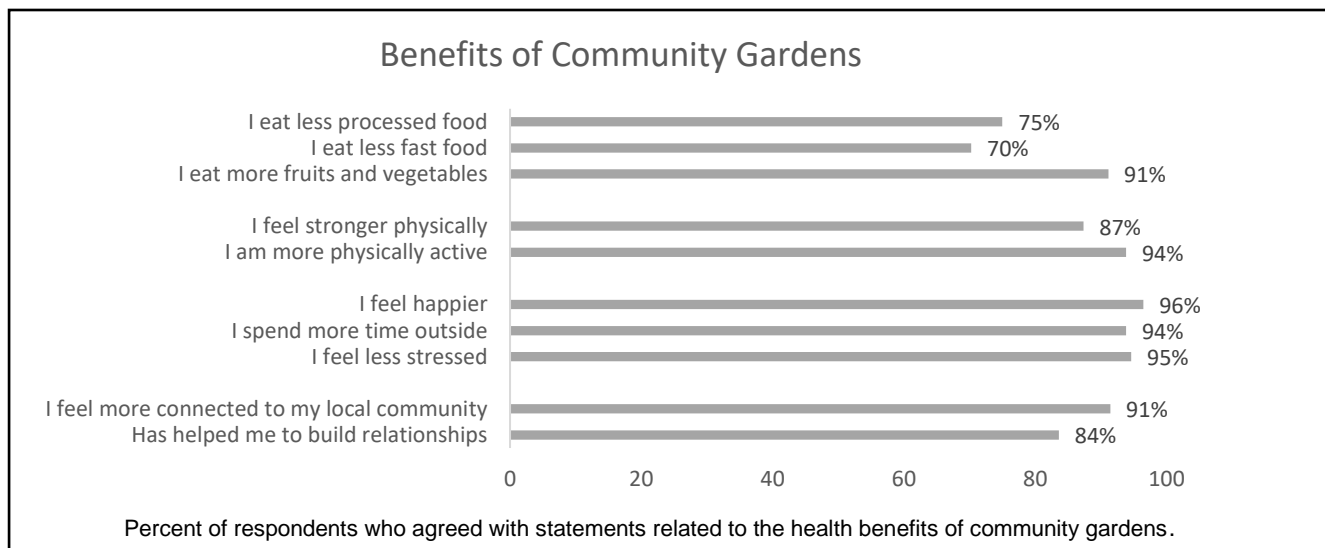
Respondents were fairly equally distributed across all age groups, except for those 18-24 years old, which were only 1.7% of respondents. Community garden participants tend to be higher income. On average, 82% of respondents visit their garden 3 times or less each week. Sixty-percent spend an hour or less each time they are in the garden.

Most gardeners (75%) can get to their community garden in 10 minutes or less. However, there may be issues of access for lower income<sup>1</sup> people. Only 12% of lower income gardeners have a garden within a 5-minute commute of home compared to 38% of higher and 41% of moderate income gardeners.

As expected, it appears that gardeners who have a shorter commute to their community garden use it more often. For example, 31% of moderate users<sup>2</sup> and 30% of high users have a garden within a 5-minute commute of their home compared to 9% of low users.

### **What Benefits do People Say They Experience from Community Gardening?**

When community garden participants were asked if they agreed, somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with statements related to the health benefits of community gardens, most agreed.



Unsurprisingly, it appears gardeners who visit their community garden more often, show greater benefits than those who visit less often. These differences appear to be related to healthy eating and

<sup>1</sup> Yearly household income before tax; lower income = \$40,000 or less, moderate income = \$40,001-\$80,000, higher income = more than \$80,000.

<sup>2</sup> Low users visit their garden less than once per week, moderate users visit their garden 1-3 times per week, high users visit 4 or more times per week.

mental health more so than for physical activity. Respondents 65 years and older had similar or slightly higher benefits compared to all respondents.

Gardeners were asked about the benefits of community gardens in their own words and mentioned these themes:

- i. Improved or new relationships
- ii. Ability to grow food
- iii. Connection to nature
- iv. Mental health benefits
- v. Physical health benefits



*“Sharing in the growing experience with other gardens is amazing. It makes me walk in the neighbourhood. More active. Meeting new people.”*



*“This garden improves my life. It is my exercise (including getting to and from the garden, and working in it), my time for relaxation and reflection to recharge after stressful work, my connection to my family heritage of growing food, and a source of healthy fresh produce for my household. It is also a source of pride for me.”*

### **What Could be Done to Increase the Health Benefits of Community Gardens?**

Gardeners suggested three main areas for improvements:

- i. Having more events, both educational and social
- ii. Structural changes (e.g. picnic tables, benches, washroom facilities)
- iii. More community gardens



*“I would suggest that more shared, potluck meals, made from the gardens fruits would be a good way to cultivate better connections. I attended one such event about a month ago and I did feel more of a connection growing and enjoyed the wholesome event.”*



*“I would like to see more community gardens in Hamilton, so members could walk to their gardens”*

### **Conclusions**

While only 8% of community gardeners answered the survey, and this may not accurately represent the experience of all gardeners, respondents did represent over 20% of community gardens from across the City. Also, respondents participated in a variety of community garden models including communal or collective gardens, traditional plot-based gardens as well as donation gardens.

This survey highlighted several health benefits related to using community gardens, including improved diet, reduced stress and increased connectedness to the community. These benefits were greater for people who gardened more frequently.

There may be issues accessing community gardens for lower income people and families. Ensuring that community gardens are located within a 10-minute walk of people’s home will help to increase health benefits. However, what also needs to be considered is other models of community gardening (vs. plot-based), such as collective gardening, that may address issues of access for lower income as well as younger individuals. Supporting volunteer garden coordinators with the organization of social and educational events, would also help to increase health benefits. Additionally, consideration should be given to the physical structures (e.g. benches, picnic tables) at each garden, which might promote socializing. These benefits can be realized, and enhanced, through leveraging existing, as well as new, community partnerships.